

Barrington Stage Company, Pittsfield, MA

*All of Me*, by Laura Winters. Directed by Ashley Brooke Monroe.

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman

**"I'm gonna head up to my room slash coffin now."**

It's a special week in theatre with two plays in two states, both comedies, about adults with physical disabilities: first Harbinger Theatre's *Andy and the Orphans* in Albany and now, two nights later, *All of Me* at Barrington Stage in Pittsfield. This second play deals with a man and a woman confined to their automated chairs communicating through their computer controlled AAC voice alternatives. Except for occasional moments, both lead actors Madison Ferris as Lucy and Danny J. Gomez as Alfonso speak electronically. As difficult as that sounds both do it extremely well and though confined to a scooter (Ferris) and a wheelchair (Gomez) they still move around the stage with alacrity and speed and with the dexterity to even play a love scene or two.



Alexandra Seal, Jack Fellows, Madison Ferris; Photo: Daniel Rader

Laura Winters' prize-winning play in its World Premiere production hits its mark with every dialogue, every scene and every character. This is due, in part, to the talents of its cast, the vision of its director and the physical interpretation by its designers. The wit in the script is often sarcastic or sardonic or just clever as it carries the unusual plot forward. The outpatient loading zone to a hospital is where it all begins and the beginning is both clever and awkward, a state that everyone remains in for a long time.



Madison Ferris, Danny J. Gomez; Photo: Daniel Rader

Playing traditional romantic comedy is difficult enough these days, but playing them from a wheelchair's distance with ipods instead of real voices is even more outrageous. Ferris and Gomez get into it with a fervor and an openness that average Joes could never achieve. The actors around them play the fully functional families who exist on an unrealistic plane in comparison.

As Connie, Ferris's Lucy's mother, Leah Hocking has the most difficult role to play. She is a bitter woman, abandoned by her husband with two daughters to raise, abuse problems of her own and very little income. Hocking gives the woman a level of human fragility, masked by indignity and the need to be in control. She is fascinating to watch. Her older daughter Jackie is expertly played by Alexandra Seal who brings to the stage a woman of determination and need. Normality and a home of her own is the center of her existence. Seal's best moments come on Jackie's wedding day when her missing fiancé nearly drives the already frantic bride into a tirade of hysteria. This is perhaps one of the best Bride-to-be scenes I have ever watched.

Jackie's live-in boyfriend Moose is amusingly played by Jack Fellows who also doubles for a moment as an interested party who is rebuffed by Lucy and Alfonso. Maggie Bofill plays the autocratic and abusive mother of Alfonso, a woman who won't have her son used and abused by a woman from a poor family, even if she is equally limited by her personal situation. She is the opposite of Connie, Hocking's character, though she is instinctively the same character in better

clothes and a finer environment. It becomes clear that she is as flawed as her opposite, though in different ways; the rich and the poor, the local and the exotic, cannot play together as similar as they both are.

Brian Prather's set is a magical thing that brings an element to this play without which the play could lie dormant. As the play moves from one location to another, the set design alters, changes shape and direction and forces us, the audience, into different worlds one after the other. Technically



Danny J. Gomez, Madison Ferris; Photo: Daniel Rader



Maggie Bofill, Leah Hocking; Photo: Daniel Rader



the set is a character of its own and a welcome one at that.

Ferris is anything but charming as Lucy. She has a temper, gets irritable, gets silly and gets sweet as candy in the love scenes. She plays the rom-com character, limited and handicapped, as though there were no impediments to play around. She is wonderful at this work and she slowly grows into someone we absolutely must like. Danny J. Gonez is her direct opposite. He starts charming, slowly grows frustrated and ultimately warms into a human being worthy of psycho-sexual worship. His playing of the role of Alfonso brings us more, and deeper, understanding of what limitations are capable of achieving, all on their own. There is a grandeur to his performance and even when we don't like him we want to and that's enough.



Madison Ferris, Danny J. Gomez; Photo: Daniel Rader

Ashley Brooke Monroe has managed to bring a difficult and unusual play about difficult and unusual people across the divide of the footlights and plunked it down on our laps, where Lucy and her swain wish they could be. There is a very natural flow to the action and Monroe directs the most daring, fly-on-the-wall realization of this new script to us as an unwrapped gift, meant to please and enlighten us all at once. Her creative team of Prather, Sarah LeFaber (costumes), Miriam Nilofa Crowe (lights) and Matt Otto (sound) have delivered a very worthwhile production, Julianne Boyd's final project as the Producer/Artistic Director at Barrington Stage Company. The opening night audience was filled with people with disabilities and the theater accommodated them beautifully in moveable seats in the first row and elsewhere. As we all laughed at the play we all felt we had been given a gift, as Lucy has been for her birthday and Jackie has for her wedding and Alfonso has for simply being himself. I encourage everyone to come and share this gift, this Bonnie and Terry Burman Award winning new play at Barrington Stage.

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**All of Me** plays at Barrington Stage Company's Boyd-Quinson Stage, 30 Union Street, Pittsfield, MA through October 9. For information and tickets call 413-236-8888 or go to their website at [www.Barringtonstageco.org](http://www.Barringtonstageco.org).